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Cinderella and *Romeo and Juliet*

by Iris Morley

In the Soviet Union of today, as in the Imperial Russia of the past, ballet occupies the position of a major art and enjoys all the privileges of that station, not the least of which is having original music composed for each new work. Few of the distinguished names in Soviet music have not, at some time or other, appeared upon the score for a ballet, and as these are all three or four acts long, composing for the ballet can be compared to writing an opera—a major work requiring time and co-operation with the other arts involved.

The composer who has perhaps been most successful in writing for the classical ballet is Prokofieff, and at least two of his works, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*, show that extraordinary creative understanding of the choreographic style of the period which in earlier times distinguished the ballets of Tchaikovsky. The relationship of a really brilliant ballet composer not only with a particular choreographer but with the current balletic form is very intimate indeed, one reacting on the other in a process of growth. If, for instance, we are able to see *Zoloushka* in Moscow and *Cinderella* at Covent Garden we realize this very clearly. Prokofieff composed much of this music in consultation with Zakharov, the choreographer, but even when he did not he had a certain mental picture in view : the stage at the Bolshoi or the Kirovsky and the kind of productions that appear on them. Frederick Ashton, of course, creates in an entirely different style : he has never been to Russia and had nothing to go on but the Prokofieff score, which, like a letter written to someone else, was full of meanings which naturally escaped him. Besides, he wished to give it his own meaning : consequently the result—a Western ballet set to modern Russian music—cannot stand comparison with the original. This is not meant as a criticism of Mr. Ashton whose ballet has its own beauties and significance, but simply to point out a fact : namely, that there must be a close living relationship between the music and what takes place upon the stage if the best results are to be achieved.

In the Russian *Cinderella*, the sisters are comely young women only ugly, cruel or riduculous in the quality of their dances, and in many other small ways throughout the first act there is more reliance on the skill and expression of the dancers than on scenic effects or costumes, gorgeous as these may be. For instance, at Covent Garden the portrait of Cinderella's mother hangs above the chimney piece in a solid realistic frame so that you can see who it is. In Russia the picture is nothing but a scrap of cardboard or paper kept under an old cushion on the hearth—we only know what it is by watching Cinderella. I would guess—though it is nothing but a guess—that Prokofieff had Ulanova in mind when he wrote Cinderella's little dance with the broom. The exquisite musicality of this dancer, the tender phrasing of her movements gives radiance to the music—in a sense it completes it as playing water does a fountain. In the dances of the four seasons, Spring and Summer are preludes to Autumn and the climax of Winter. The exciting tumult of the autumn music is expressed in the much more dynamic approach of Russian dancers and the greater use of *grand jetée* and other steps of elevation made by Russian choreographers. Winter's dance is brilliant with good nature rather than frost ; she wears a

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traditional Russian crown upon her head and her dance is based upon the movements of the Ukranian *gopak*.

It is in the ball scene, however, that Prokofieff and Zakharov achieve the fullest unity of expression. That somewhat astringent, brittle and most exciting music is the framework of a scene of brilliant and profuse splendour, of the eddy and swirl of a ballroom thronged with people. There are mercurial changes in the choreographic mood : dignity erupts into the intoxication of fireworks and sinks to a solitary and moonlit tenderness. The interpolations of sisters or jesters, the final nightmare catastrophe form a drama whose mounting intensity we are forced to share. The music, in fact, is exactly what the spectacle needs ; the dash of lemon which prevents the richness from overwhelming us. To present the ball quite differently as Mr. Ashton did : all in the best French taste and on one cool, poetic note is to overload the muics by failing to provide a contrast.

Romeo and Juliet is of course an earlier work than *Cinderella*—it was first produced in Russia in 1940 and was revived after the war. The choreography is by Lavrovsky and the décor by Williams.

This is not only, on mature reflection, the greatest ballet I have ever seen, but its achievement is of the most extraordinary kind. After four and a half hours you leave the theatre feeling not only that you have seen Romeo and Juliet but that you have realized, perhaps for the first time, all the implications of the play.

Having seen this ballet several times I have always noticed one thing : at the end there is only little applause—not because it is not liked but because people feel so drained of emotion that all they want to do is leave their seats quietly and go home. During the 1947 Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow there was naturally a great influx of foreigners at the Bolshoi. Many people who knew little of the ballet and seldom went in London or Paris or New York now found themselves going two or three nights a week. I think the response of the majority is very well expressed by Alexander Clifford, the *Daily Mail* correspondent, in his book *The Sickle and the Stars*. " The ballet was *Romeo and Juliet*," he writes, " the one so stuffed with colour and violence and emotion and swordplay that some people can't take more than one act of it per night. . . As art it seems to be a new form. There is very little real dancing. It is rather an elaborate mime or an opera without words. . . . The production really is stupendous. The costumes are wonderful. The ballerinas are girls of incredible grace and poise—lovely long swanlike necks and aristocratic faces. The stagecraft and scene changing are the slickest and quickest I have ever seen. In fact in London you could charge five guineas a seat and the thing would run forever."

One point about this I think is very interesting. Mr. Clifford is an infrequent ballet goer and he did not realize that most of *Romeo and Juliet* is, in fact, carried out in terms of the classic dance—so completely does the drama shine through Lavrovsky's choreography.

One of the new things about this ballet is that the technique of the cinema is used to give a heightened sense of action ; again and again the musical themes are broken and re-woven like the change in a camera's focus. This is particularly effective in the second act where the action changes to and fro between a piazza in Verona, the friar's cell and various connecting sequences before a curtain.

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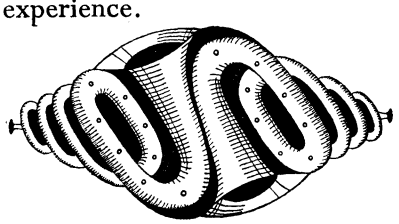
In his music Prokofieff has accentuated two themes which like rival poles of power give point to the drama. One is the music of the cushion dance which constantly recurring associates doom and tragedy with the form of society represented by the older Capulets and Montagues. In contrast to this there is the lyrical music—perhaps too chaste and tender—which is expressed by Juliet and her friends. It might well be argued that the play gives no basis for this division, that Romeo and Juliet though young and in love are formed of exactly the same stuff as their parents and the society in which they live. However it certainly adds to the dramatic effectiveness and brings an air of crushng fate to the final tragedy.

Perhaps it is not the business of a ballet to interpret a play, or of music to express Shakespearian poetry—be that as it may ; but to see this ballet is to have an unforgettable experience.



PROKOFIEFF ON RECORDS

By F.F.C. & G.I.C.

ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES

(a) Not identified on the label, but probably this prelude.
(b) Arrangement by the Composer.
Col. Columbia **LO** series: Australian. **D** series: French.
Am. Col. : American Columbia.
Vic. : Victor. **(Arg.** : Argentine Issue).
C.d.M. : Chant du Monde, France.
Y.P.R. : Young People's Records U.S.A.
U.S.S.R. : Soviet State Music Trust. (A guarantee of completeness from this source cannot unfortunately be given).
Am. Vox : American Vox.
C.H.S. : Concert Hall Society, U.S.A.
Ultraph : Ultraphone, Czechoslovakia.
Con. : Continental, U.S.A.
The dates in the last column are the approximate dates of recording and/or issue.

Alexander Nevsky (Film Music, 1938) Arise, ye Russian People / Song of Alexander Nevsky	Moscow State Chorus	**Col. FB 2758** / **U.S.S.R. 11050-1**	**1941**
Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78 (Cantata)	J. Tourel, Westminster Choir, Philadelphia Sym. ORMANDY	**Col. LX 977-81** / **Am. Col. Set M 580**	**1945**
Andante, Op. 29 SEE: Sonatas			
Buffoon, The, Op. 21 (*Chout*) Ballet			
Orchestral Suite No. 1, Op. 21 *bis*. Danse finale only	Lamoureux Orch. WOLFF	**Decca CA 8188-9** / **Polydor 516583-4** / **Fonit 91048-9**	**1934**
	Boston Sym. KOUSSEVITZKY	**In Vic. Set M 1241**	**1948**
	Poulet Orch. POULET	**Parlo. DPX 9**	**1932**
Cinderella, Ballet, Op. 97 No. 19, Waltz and No. 36, Adagio	Bolshoi Theatre FAYER	**U.S.S.R. 13496-8**	**1947**
CONCERTOS			
Pf. & Orch. No. 3,	D. Mitropoulos & Robin Hood Dell Orchestra	**Am. Col. Set M 667**	**1947**
C major, Op. 26	Composer & L.S.O. COPPOLA	**H.M.V. DB 1725-7** / **Victor Set M 176**	**1932**
Violin and Orchestra			
No. 1, D major, Op. 19	D. Oistrakh & Moscow State Orchestra KONDRASHIN	**U.S.S.R. 015181-5**	**1947**
	J. Szigeti & L.P.O. BEECHAM	**Col. LX 433-5** / **Am. Col. Set M 244**	**1935**
No. 2, G minor, Op. 63	J Heifetz & Boston Sym. Orch. KOUSSEVITZKY	**H.M.V. DB 3604-6** / **Victor Set M 450**	**1938**

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